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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 001867

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [PM](#)
SUBJECT: PANAMA: PMG'S DAY OF MOURNING RESOLUTION "WILL NOT PASS"

Classified By: Ambassador William A. Eaton. Reasons: 1.4 (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) "Pedro Miguel's bill to declare December 20 a National Day of Mourning will not pass," First VP and FM Samuel Lewis assured Ambassador in a December 13 telcon. The day before, National Assembly Deputy Juan Manuel Peralta, at the behest of National Assembly President Pedro Miguel Gonzalez (PMG), presented draft legislation to establish December 20 -- the anniversary of the initiation of OPERATION JUST CAUSE -- as a National Day of Mourning. (Note: PMG is under federal indictment on several counts in connection with the 1992 murder of a U.S. serviceman.) Ambassador expressed his relief at Lewis' reassurance, adding that such a bill signed by President Torrijos would complicate our bilateral environment. Lewis said he fully agreed, reiterated that this resolution would be stopped, and noted that this latest incident highlighted the difficulties that the Torrijos Administration faced in dealing with PMG. Post strongly recommends against any effort to take PMG head on as it is precisely a clash with the U.S. that PMG seeks to propel himself politically.

Justification for the Bill

¶2. (SBU) In six paragraphs, the justification (exposicion de motivos) required by National Assembly rules to accompany any proposed draft bill (anteproyecto) goes on a polemical, anti-American tear. The opening paragraph, presenting Panama as a jilted U.S. ally, provides a good sample of the vitriol behind PMG's initiative:

"During a historical period of our national life fraught with political and social transformation, homes pummeled by the economic crisis caused by the economic siege imposed by our ever ally, the United States of America, and at a time when thousands of Panamanian homes were preparing to celebrate, with the best that they had within their reach, the birth of the Savior of the World, Jesus Christ, the most powerful army in the world, in an irresponsible manner, lashed out vilely against the men, women, and children of El Chorrillo (a neighborhood in Panama City) and nearby areas, that at the moment in which they were dreaming of presents from the heavens jumped to their feet."

¶3. (U) The justification goes on to assert, "Blows when they

come from friends or relatives hurt for all eternity." The purpose, therefore, of the proposed resolution is to give an outlet for the mourning "in the hearts of the Panamanian people," and to reflect on the facts and circumstances that led to JUST CAUSE so that "no such act is ever repeated." To achieve these goals -- mourning and reflection -- the bill would:

- order the flag to be flown at half-mast;
- prohibit the sale of liquor;
- urge all churches to pray for "justice and peace;"
- dedicate one hour of class time to the "study and analysis" of the events of December 20; and
- ask that "murals alluding to the date" by displaying the "culture of peace among all Panamanians" be displayed.

The Bill

14. (U) The National Assembly promptly admitted the draft proposed bill (anteproyecto) as a draft bill (proyecto) on December 12 and referred it to its first of three required debates. The draft bill would decree that December 20 be declared annually to be a Day of National Mourning during which the Panamanian flag would be flown at half-mast on which:

- Radio and television broadcasters would not broadcast "raucus" music;
- The sale and consumption of alcohol would be banned;
- Public music "spectacles" not be allowed;
- It would be also a Day of Reflection;
- Public offices would display "murals" underscoring "the culture of peace and fraternity among all inhabitants of the Panamanian isthmus;

The draft bill also calls for the Statistics and Census Directorate of the Comptroller General's Office, for the 2010 census, to provide the number of Panamanians that perished in the "December invasion" and for the Attorney General's Office to investigate whether "other" mass graves exist in which the fallen from the invasion are buried and, if they are found, exhume the bodies to account for these fallen individuals. (It would, however, be a work day.)

Negative Reactions

15. (SBU) Opposition Panamenista Party members are considering a bill to make June 10 a Day of National Mourning. (Note: June 10, 1987 -- known as Black Friday -- was the date on which Noriega thugs lashed out at a peaceful demonstration by the Civil Crusada with clubs, dogs, tear gas and live gunfire.) Some business groups are upset that this National Day of Mourning would quickly become a paid, day-off only five days before Christmas.

Comment

16. (C) . In addition to pushing his National Day of Mourning resolution, PMG yesterday also called for the abrogation of the Salas-Becker Maritime Cooperation Agreement, a cornerstone of the U.S.-Panamanian counternarcotics cooperation, on the grounds that it "unconstitutionally" allowed a foreign power to seize Panamanian nationals aboard Panamanian flagged ships.

17. (C) . PMG is desperate for attention. Since discussion here of the impact of PMG's election on the U.S.-Panama Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA) has ebbed away, PMG has found himself unable to sustain the public profile that he desires. Taking shots at the U.S. and striving to put Torrijos in an awkward position with respect to his relationship with the U.S., PMG is attempting to recuperate a measure of public

notoriety. Most Panamanians are scratching their head about PMG's shenanigans and accept, though perhaps not as vocally as they could, that JUST CAUSE removed a dictator and restored democracy. PMG's political maneuverings will also test the patience of PRD deputies who wished to exert the independence of the National Assembly by electing PMG president to the consternation of Torrijos but who are not comfortable with PMG's retrograde and backward looking antics. Finally, this incident also highlights the depths to which legislative-executive relations have sunk since PMG's election. Post recommends strongly against any frontal assault on PMG's antics. If pressed for comment, a pithy reminder that the U.S. wishes to look forward, not backward, and is very heartened to have had a democratic partner for these past seventeen years to work with on a a broad, deep, and mutually shared agenda should suffice.

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